

**Opening Statement**  
**Chairman Dan Burton**  
**Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere**  
**Committee on International Relations**  
**“U.S.-Mexico Relations”**  
**April 26, 2006**

Today the Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere will hear testimony on the current state of relations between the United States and Mexico. In his National Security Strategy for 2006, President Bush urged a deepening of our ties to Mexico if we want to see cooperative policies be extended and carried out through the region of Latin America. He has also repeatedly illustrated how important it is to maintain a good relationship with Mexico. I couldn't agree more with the President in his assessment. Mexico is the gateway to South America, both physically and intellectually, and we need to continue to work with the government in Mexico if we wish to succeed in promoting growth and stability throughout the region, and stemming the rising threats throughout our Hemisphere.

Today's geopolitical reality underscores the importance of U.S.-Mexico relations. With a leftist tide sweeping over much of Latin America, championed by Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, the U.S. needs to maintain the friends it has, and do what it can to bolster those friendships. While we have enjoyed a great bilateral friendship with Mexico these last several years under President Vicente Fox, there are some major policy issues we need to work through.

Border security and immigration are the issues of top concern to many Americans right now, and not coincidentally, they are the most contentious issues between the U.S. and Mexico. Illegal immigration to the United States from Mexico continues largely because of a stagnant Mexican economy. While President Fox has made strides in improving Mexico's economy since he took office in 2001, job opportunities in Mexico are scarce, and where they do exist, they do not pay as well as many jobs in the United States. This causes many Mexican nationals, in turn, to migrate to the U.S., where they can work and send remittances back to their families. A necessary precondition to stem the flow of illegal immigrants into the United States will be to work together with Mexico to better stabilize and strengthen its economy.

Since NAFTA went into effect in 1994, it is indisputable that trade between the U.S. and Mexico has grown significantly. In fact, it has almost quadrupled from \$81 billion in 1993 to \$292 billion in 2005. The U.S. is now Mexico's most important trading partner, accounting for over 85% of Mexico's exports and 60% of Mexico's imports. Conversely, Mexico is the United States' second most important trading partner, with 13% of U.S. exports going to Mexico and 10% of imports coming from Mexico. Mexico is the world's fifth largest crude oil producer, and according to the Department of Energy, Mexico ships 88% of its oil exports to the U.S., ranking it among our top three suppliers.

Despite the progress and deepening commercial engagement, there have been bumps in the road with regard to our bilateral trade, and I believe there is room for improvement. With the help of a cooperative administration in Mexico, we can resolve trade disputes, and make trade easier and more beneficial for the people of both our countries. Last month our two countries made progress in a longstanding dispute over soft drink beverages and applied adjustments on tariff rate quotas on sugar and high fructose corn syrup.

The issue of illegal immigration is as important to the Mexican people as it is to Americans. While the strengthening of the Mexican economy will help to solve the problem of illegal immigration, there will still be those seeking work in the United States, and there will be employers inside America who remain willing to hire them. President Fox has repeatedly called for enactment of some sort of guest-worker program inside the United States, and Congress is now deliberating over various options on the table.

But Mexico needs to do its part to help the United States. The drug trade continues to be a thorn in the side of U.S.-Mexico relations and as Congress prepares to solve the worsening crisis of illegal immigration, it is important that Mexican authorities ratchet-up counter-narcotics law enforcement and aggressively prosecute traffickers and those who aid them. According to the most recent report from the State Department, Mexico is the primary transit point for cocaine entering the U.S. from South America, and continues to be a main source country for heroin, marijuana, and methamphetamine. Narco-trafficking is fueling the recent rash of violence which thrives in towns located on the U.S.-Mexico border. I am very concerned about reports of Mexican military personnel or those posing as Mexican military personnel, illegally crossing the border, and in some instances, providing protective cover for drug smugglers. Equally pressing is the serious rise in the number of assaults on our border patrol agents.

The issue of human rights is a major focal point between our two nations. The Mexican government has charged the U.S. to find a humane solution to the problem of illegal immigration, concerned because of the severe conditions many Mexican citizens have to endure to get across the border. I agree that something needs to be done, but at the same time, I remain concerned that human rights in Mexico are deteriorating. Powerful drug cartels are able to exert their influence to intimidate, and sometimes injure or kill, those who speak out against them. Mexico serves as a transit point for those trafficking women and children for sexual and labor exploitation. And it is most ironic that Mexico calls for a humane solution to illegal immigration, while its own constitution denies immigrants to Mexico – both legal and illegal – the ability to own property, the right to free speech and equal employment.

While Mexico and the United States might not agree on everything, our relationship remains solidly intact. Five years of working with the administration of Vicente Fox has changed the nature of our relationship from one of antagonism, to one of cooperation. After 70 years of poor cooperation between the U.S. and Mexico – at best – and outright hostility at worst, this is a most welcome change. I believe we are on the right path with Mexico. I look forward to working with the Fox Administration in its final stages, and I also look forward to welcoming Mexico's new President, in the interest of continuing our relationship, whoever that may be.